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IN THE CLAIMS

*The status of the claims as presently amended is as follows:*

1. (*Previously Presented*) An image search apparatus comprising:

referring means for referring to a keyword table in a memory, wherein the keyword table includes a keyword that corresponds to a plurality of different images, and a plurality of levels of importance of the keyword with respect to said plurality of different images;

search means for searching said plurality of different images according to an input search query related to the keyword;

acquiring means for acquiring said plurality of levels of importance of the keyword based on the images searched by said search means; and

output means for outputting said plurality of images searched by said search means in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the keyword acquired by said acquiring means.

2. (*Previously Presented*) An image search apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said output means outputs said plurality of images according to a standard level of importance of a default when said plurality of levels of importance are not stored in relation to the keywords keyword.

3. (*Previously Presented*) An Image search apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said acquiring means acquires a level of accordance between at least one synonym of said keyword and said input search query and said output means outputs said plurality of images searched by said search means in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the keyword acquired by said acquiring means and said level of accordance acquired by said acquiring means.

4-5. (*Canceled*)

6. (*Previously Presented*) An image search apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said image search apparatus is provided in a server of an information retrieval system on the Internet, an input means receiving a search query inputted from a WWW browser of a client of said information retrieval system on the Internet, said output means outputting said plurality of images searched by said search means in a predetermined format, which includes HTML and XML, to said client in said order.

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7. (*Previously Presented*) An image search method applied to an image search apparatus comprising:

a referring step of referring to a keyword table in a memory, wherein the keyword table includes a keyword that corresponds to a plurality of different images, and a plurality of levels of importance of the keyword with respect to said plurality of different images;

a searching step of searching said plurality of different images according to an input search query related to the keyword;

an acquiring step of acquiring said plurality of levels of importance of the keyword based on the images searched by said searching step; and

an output step of outputting said plurality of images searched by said searching step in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the keyword acquired by said acquiring step.

8. (*Previously Presented*) An image search method according to claim 7, wherein said plurality of images are output according to a standard level of importance of a default when said plurality of levels of importance are not stored in relation to the keyword.

9. (*Previously Presented*) An image search method according to claim 7, wherein a level of accordance between at least one synonym of said keyword and said input search query is acquired and said plurality of images are output, said plurality of images searched by said searching step in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the keyword acquired by said acquiring step and said level of accordance acquired by said acquiring step.

10-11. (*Canceled*)

12. (*Previously Presented*) An image search method according to claim 7, wherein an input step comprises receiving a search query inputted from a WWW browser of a client of an information retrieval system on the Internet, said output step outputting said plurality of images searched by said searching step in a predetermined format, which includes HTML and XML, to said client in said order.

13. (*Previously Presented*) A storage medium that can be read by a computer and stores a program for executing an image search applied to an image search apparatus comprising instructions for:

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referring to a keyword table in a memory, wherein the keyword table includes a keyword that corresponds to a plurality of different images, and a plurality of levels of importance of the keyword with respect to said plurality of different images;

searching said plurality of different images according to an input search query related to the keyword;

acquiring said plurality of levels of importance of the keyword based on the images searched by said searching instruction; and

outputting said plurality of images searched by said searching instruction in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the keyword acquired by said acquiring instruction.

14. (*Previously Presented*) A storage medium according to claim 13, wherein said plurality of image data images are output according to a standard level of importance of a default when said plurality of levels of importance are not stored in relation to the keyword.

15. (*Previously Presented*) A storage medium according to claim 13, wherein a level of accordance between at least one synonym of said keyword and said input search query is acquired and said plurality of images are output, said plurality of images searched by said searching instruction in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the keyword and said level of accordance.

16-17. (*Canceled*)

18. (*Previously Presented*) A storage medium according to claim 13, wherein an input instruction comprises receiving a search query inputted from a WWW browser of a client of an information retrieval system on the Internet, said output instruction outputting said plurality of images searched by said searching instruction in a predetermined format, which includes HTML and XML, to said client in said order.

19. (*Previously Presented*) A contents search apparatus comprising:

referring means for referring to a keyword table in a memory, wherein the keyword table includes a keyword that corresponds to a plurality of different contents, and a plurality of levels of importance of the keyword with respect to said plurality of different contents;

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search means for searching said plurality of different contents according to an input search query related to the keyword;

acquiring means for acquiring said plurality of levels of importance of the keyword based on the contents searched by said search means; and

output means for outputting said plurality of contents searched by said search means in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the keyword acquired by said acquiring means.

20. (*Currently Amended*) A computer-implemented contents search method applied to a contents search apparatus, the method comprising:

a referring step of referring to a keyword table in a memory, wherein the keyword table includes a keyword that corresponds to a plurality of different contents, and a plurality of levels of importance of the keyword with respect to said plurality of different contents;

a searching step of searching said plurality of different contents according to an input search query related to the keyword;

an acquiring step of acquiring said plurality of levels of importance of the keyword based on the contents searched by said searching step; and

an output step of outputting said plurality of contents searched by said searching step in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the keyword acquired by said acquiring step.

21. (*Previously Presented*) A storage medium that can be read by a computer and stores a program for executing a contents search applied to a contents search apparatus, the program comprising instructions for:

referring to a keyword table in a memory, wherein the keyword table includes a keyword that corresponds to a plurality of different contents, and a plurality of levels of importance of the keyword with respect to said plurality of different contents;

searching said plurality of different contents according to an input search query related to the keyword;

acquiring said plurality of levels of importance of the keyword based on the contents searched by said searching instruction; and

outputting said plurality of contents searched by said searching instruction in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the keyword acquired by said acquiring instruction.

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22. (New) An image search apparatus comprising:

referring device that refers to a keyword table in a memory, wherein the keyword table includes a keyword that corresponds to a plurality of different images, and a plurality of levels of importance of the keyword with respect to said plurality of different images;

search device that searches said plurality of different images according to an input search query related to the keyword;

acquiring device that acquires said plurality of levels of importance of the keyword based on the images searched by said search device; and

output device that outputs said plurality of images searched by said search device in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the keyword acquired by said acquiring device.